

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 10764 01 OF 02 101102Z

11

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 10764

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, TH

SUBJ: BUNLOET, PHO SU AND CONCILIATORY SECURITY POLICIES

FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION BANGKOK FM SONGKHLA APR 11 RPTD
FOR YOUR INFO:

SONGKHLA 052

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, TH

SUBJ: BUNLOET, PHO SU AND CONCILIATORY SECURITY POLICIES

REF: A) BANGKOK 5364

B) SONGKHLA 47

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SUMMARY: HISTORY IS REPEATING ITSELF IN THE SOUTH. TRADING
ON A LONG FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER BUNLOET
LOETPRICHA AND ALLEGED BANDIT LEADER PHO SU WAMAETISA, THE
KHUKRIT CABINET HAS RENEWED PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS' INITIATIVES
TO GET PHO SU TO SU AFTER A WEEK LONG PILGRIMAGE THROUGH THE
SOUTH, BUNLOET MADE HIS OFFER AMONG A MEETING OF FRIENDS AT THE
NARATHIWAT GOVERNOR'S HOUSE APRIL 10. PHO SU, A MAN WITH ENEMIES
ON BOTH SIDES OF THE LAW, HAS ASKED FOR ONE MONTH TO CONVINCE
HIS FOLLOWERS TO ACCEPT THE RTG'S OVERTURE.

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 10764 01 OF 02 101102Z

IF PHO SU SURRENDERS, THE RGG MAY HAVE FOUND A NEW INTERNAL SECURITY POLICY FOR THE SOUTH, AND PERHAPS THE NATION. IF THE BUNLOET INITIATIVE FAILS, THE REBUFFED RTG, MAY BE UNABLE TO DECIDE ON WHAT CI POLICIES THE KHUKRIT CABINET IS WILLING TO POLITICALLY SUPPORT. END SUMMARY.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. ALLEGED BANDIT AND MUSLIM SEPARATIST LEADER PHO SU WAMAETISA HAS LONG BEEN THE TARGET OF INDUCEMENTS FROM BANGKOK TO SURRENDER. HE ONCE TURNED HIMSELF OVER TO SPECIAL BRANCH POLICE IN 1966 AND SPENT FIVE YEARS IN A KORAT DETENTION CENTER AWAITING TRIAL. A BANGKOK MILITARY COURT DISMISSED THE CHARGES AGAINST HIM AND 27 FOLLOWERS ON 17 JUNE 1971. THE PRESENT CHARGES AGAINST PHO SU RELATE PARTIALLY TO A 29 SEPTEMBER 1972 ATTACK AGAINST A POLICE STATION IN RAMAN DISTRICT OF YALA PROVINCE WHICH LEFT FOUR POLICEMEN AND TWO VILLAGE DEFENSE CORPS VOLUNTEERS DEAD.

2. A TEACHER FOR 24 YEARS, PHO SU HAS AN OUTSTANDING WITH THE MUSLIM PEOPLES IN THE FOUR SOUTHERN BORDER PROVINCES. HE SERVED THESE PEOPLE AS PATRON, AND BUFFER WITH THAI OFFICIALDOM, EARNING THE VILLAGERS' RESPECT AND THE OFFICIALS' (ESPECIALLY THE POLICE) ENMITY. MANY PEOPLE, AFTER A SCRAPE WITH THE LAW, HAVE FLED TO FIND SANCTUARY WITH PHO SU. THE MILITARY ADVISOR TO THE YALA GOVERNOR ESTIMATED APRIL 9 THAT PHO SU'S ARMED FOLLOWES NUMBER 250 MEN.

3. NARONG KITTIKACHON MADE AN EFFORT IN MAY 1973 TO AFFECT PHO SU'S SURRENDER. THE PASSING OF THE THANOM GOVERNMENT IN OCTOBER 1973 LED TO A FLURRY OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES BETWEEN DECEMBER 1973 AND JANUARY 1974 LAUDING PHO SU, AND ANOTHER SERIES OF FRUITLESS NEGOTIATIONS. THE VENERABLE DEMOCRAO PARTY MADE NOISES IN 1974 ABOUT PHO SU CLEARING HIS NAME AND RUNNING ON THEIR TICKET.

II. BUNLOET'S PILGRIMAGE

4. DEPUTY MINISTER OF INTERIOR BUNLOET LOETPRICHA LEFT BANGKOK APRIL 4 AFTER DAYS OF PUBLICITY THAT HE WOULD CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 10764 01 OF 02 101102Z

RENDEZVOUS WITH PHO SU. BUNLOET IS AN OLD SOUTHERN HAND AND IS WELL ACQUAINTED WITH THE RESPECTED MUSLIM LEADER. BUNLOET WAS STATIONED IN THE SOUTH AS A POLICEMAN DURING THE EARLY 1950'S. HE PLAYED A ROLE IN THE SUPPRESSION OF A MUSLIM REVOLT AT THAT TIME. IN FACT, MUSLIMS IN THE SOUTH, BUNLOET IS THE POLICEMAN WHO ARRESTED RESPECTED HAJI SULONG, MEMBER OF PATTANI'S ROYAL FAMILY. HAJI DISAPPEARED UNDER ESCOCT TO BANGKOK.

5. STARTING AT PHUKET PROVINCE, BUNLOET, A SMALL CORE OF BANGKOK OFFICIALS HEAVILY WEIGHTED WITH PLICE (REF C) AND SOME FIFTY NEWSMEN SLOWLY WORKED THEIR WAY DOWN PENINSULAR THAILAND. THE CARAVAN STOPPED AT VIRTUALLY EVERY PROVINCE SOUTH OF PHUKET WHILE BUNLOET SPOKE TO ONLY THE RANKING PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS. SONGKHLA MUANG DISTRICT OFFICER SAID APRIL 8 THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHEN BUNLOET WOULD ARRIVE IN THE PROVINCE AND HAD NOT BEEN INVITED TO ANY WORKING SESSIONS WITH THE DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER.

III. THE NAKHON SI THAMMARAT DEMONSTRATIONS

6. BEFORE BUNLOET STARTED OUT, THE POLICE IN NAKHON SI THAMMARAT (NST) ARRESTED 17 PERSONS AND CHARGED THEM WITH VARIOUS CRIMES RELATING TO THE ARSON OF THE GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE 22 JANUARY 1975. DESPITE THE ATTITUDES IN BANGKOK POLITICAL CIRCLES THAT THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE A HARD LINE WITH DEMONSTRATORS, BANGKOK CAPITULATED TO THE STUDENT ACTIVISTS PROTESTING THE ARRESTS. BUNLOET AND SOME OF HIS PARTY LATER DIVERTED TO NST WHEN THE POLICE COUNTER-DMONSTRATED AGAINST BANGKOK'S WEAK STAND.

7. BUNLOET'S CONCILIATORY MISSION MAY HAVE PLAYED SOME ROLE IN BANGKOK'S RESPONSE TO THE NST STUDENT DEMONSTRATION. THE MEETING WITH PHO SU MIGHT NOT HAVE OCCURRED IF A HARDLINE WITH THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATORS WAS THE BACKDROP TO THE OLIVE BRANCH PROCEEDING DOWN THE PENINSULA.

8. SOUTHERNERS BELIEVE THAT THE POLICE ARE PHO SU'S ARCH ENEMY AND THE POLICE SOMETIMES ACT AS THOUGHT THEY ARE. PEACE NEGOTIATORS ON THE ROAD, LOACK OF BANGKOK SUPPORT FOR THE POLICE IN NST AND THE RECOGNITION THAT PHO SU'S REDEMPTION WILL HAVE UNTI-POLICE RAMIFICATIONS, ALL MAY HAVE ENCOURAGED POLICE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BANGKO 10764 01 OF 02 101102Z

OFFICERS TO ALLOW THEIR MEN TO "STRIKE" AT NST. (COMMENT: DURING PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO ENGINEER PHO SU'S SURRENDER, THE LATTER TABLED A SERIES OF CONDITIONS WHICH INCLUDED THE TRANSFER OF POLICE OFFICERS IN THE SOUTH.)

9. DURING THE POLICE STRIKE IN NST, PRICHA KOSONPHAN, INSPECTOR, PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND BANGKOK'S FREQUENTLY USED LINK TO PHO SU, CAME AHEAD OF THE BUNLOET PARTY. ACCORDING TO SANIT YUNGCHAROEN, SECRETARY TO NARATHIWAT GOVERNOR WATCHARA SINGKHIWIBUN, PRICHA AND PHO SU MADE FINAL ARRANGEMENTS AROUND ARIL 5 FOR THE LATTER MEETING.

IV. THE MEETING

10. NARATHIWAT PROVINCIAL OFFICERS TOLD US APRIL 11 THAT A

24-HOUR CEASEFIRE WENT INTO AFFECT BEFORE THE BUNLOET-PHO SU MEETING OF APRIL 10. THE RTG WITHDREW SOLDIERS AND POLICE FROM THE AREA OF RAMAN DISTRICT AS PROOF OF ITS INTENTIONS, FOR A DAY.

11. PRICHA AND SANIT ACCOMPANIED THE POLICE HELICOPTER WHICH PICKED UP HO SU AT HIS NATIVE CHARANG THATONG VILLAGE, RAMAN DISTRICT, YALA PROVINCE. PHO SU'S FIRST AND FOURTH WIVES AND TWO DAUGHTERS ACCOMPANIED HIM TO THE NARATHIWAT GATHERING. THE APRIL 10 MEETING WITH BUNLOET LASTED LESS THAN 30 MINUTES, PERHAPS INDICATING THAT ANUMBER OF QUESTIONS HAD ALREADY BEEN RESOLVED.

12. ACCORDING TO THE NARATHIWAT GOVERNOR'S SECRETARY APRIL 11, THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE ATTENDED THE CLOSED SESSION:
BUNLOET LOETPRICHA - DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER;
PHO SU WAMAETISA;
POL. LT. GEN. SANAN MARINTHORATHEP - COMMANDER, PROVINCIAL POLICE;
POL. MAR. GEN. AMPHON CHIPATIMA - COMMANDER, PROVINCIAL POLICE REGION 9;
PRICHA KOSONPHAN - INSPECTOR, PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE;
WATCHARA SINGKHIWIBUN - GOVERNOR, NARATHIWAT PROVINCE;
OEP ITSARA - FORMER PARLIAMENTARIAN (1950'S) AND MILLIONAIRE BUSINESSMAN FROM SUNGEI KOLOK DISTRICT, NARATHIWAT;
THAWON CHAISUWAIN - SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY PARLIAMENTARIAN FROM NARATHIWAT WHO WAS A UNITED THAI PEOPLES' PARTY RE-CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 BANGKO 10764 01 OF 02 101102Z

PRESENTATIVE IN THE 1969-1971 ASSEMBLY. HE IS ALSO A WALTHY MAN FROM SUNGEI KOLOK.

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 10764 02 OF 02 101129Z

17
ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 10764

WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF AMPHON, ALL THESE MEN HAVE LONG PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS. PRICHA WAS THE RAMAN DISTRICT OFFICER AND BUNLOET APPARENTLY THE YALA PROVINCIAL POLICE CHIEF WHEN PHO SU WAS THE CIVIC MINDED SCHOOL TEACHER. THE MEETING AND ITS GUEST LIST WAS A MUTAL EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE, SAID SANIT.

13. AFTER THE MEETING, PHO SU AND BUNLOET SMILINGLY APPEARED BEFORE THE CAPTIVATED BANGKOK AND REGIONAL PRESS. GOVERNOR WATCHARA ESCORTED PHO SU WITH HIS ARM AROUND THE LATTER'S SHOULDER, A SIGN OF INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP IN THE SOUTH. DURING THE PRESS CONFERENCE PHO SU SAID THAT HE NEEDED 30 DAYS BEFORE HE COULD GIVE THE GOVERNMENT A DEFINITE ANSWER. PH SU DENIED SETTING ANY CONDITIONS, AS YET, PRELIMINARY TO HIS SURRENDER.

14. THE MEETING WITH BUNLOET APPARENTLY LEFT PHO SU IN AN EXPANSIVE, POSITIVE MOOD. RAWAT RATCHAMUKDI, A FORMER NARATHIWAT PARLIAMENTARIAN, SAID APRIL 11 THAT DURING A SHORT CONVERSATION BEFORE PHO SU REBOARDED THE HELICOPTER, THE FORMER TEACHER REMARKED THAT THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME HE HAD SPOKEN WITH A CABINET LEVEL OFFICAL.

V. THE DANGERS OF THE MONTH'S DELAY

15. SANIT YUNGCHAROEN, THE NARATHIWAT GOVERNOR'S SECRETARY AND INTIMATE TO THE SCENE, SAID THAT IF HE WERE PHO SU, HE WOULD NOT SURRENDER. BANGKOK POLITICS ARE SO SHAKY THAT IF
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 10764 02 OF 02 101129Z

BUNLOET LOSES HIS POSITION, THERE MAY BE NO ONE TO GUARANTEE THE AGREEMENT. HE THINKS PHO SU, HOWEVER, IS PREPARED TO THROW HIS LOT WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

16. THE MONTH LONG DELAY HAS ITS RISKS BECAUSE IT GIVES TIME TO VARIOUS FORCES WHICH MAY HAVE REASONS TO OPPOSE A FAITHFUL RECONCILIATION:

A. THE SEPARTISTS (SEE SONGKHLA A-7 OF 10 NOVEMBER 1972) - WITH PHO SU'S GROUP NEUTRALIZED, ABDUL YALA NASE SAIBU'S FACTION AND THE BLACK 1902 MOVEMENT, AMONG OTHERS, WILL PROBABLY BE AT A MILITARY DISADVANTAGE VIS-A-VIS A GOVERNMENT WITH FEWER ARMED BANDS TO SUPPRESS. FURTHERMORE, THE IMAGE OF PHO SU BEING WELL TREATED AND POSSIBLY WORKING FOR THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE A STIFF PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOW. THE SEPARATISTS,

WHO ALSO HAVE PERSONAL ANIMOSITIES AGAINST PHO SU, MAY CONSIDER ENGINEERING HIS DEATH.

B. THAI POLICE - THE VENALITY OF THE POLICE IS A WELL ACCZKGRN AND PROBABLY CORRECT, AXIOM IN THE SOUTH. PHO SU HAS FOUND HIMSELF TRYING TO MEDIATE POLICE EXCESS AND THIS HAS MADE HIM ANATHEMA TO THE POLICE. PHO SU REPORTEDLY ASKED FOR THE TRANSFER OF CERTAIN POLICE OFFICERS DURING THE MAY 1973 NEGOTIATIONS WITH NARONG KITTIKACHON. PHO SU'S SURRENDER MAY BREAK SOME HIGHLY PLACED POLICE RICE BOWLS. THE DISTRUST BETWEEN THESE QUARTERS IS SO GREAT THAT ASSASSINATION IS NOT OUT OF THE QUESTION.

C. COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND (CPT) - THE CPT APPARENTLY FAILED IN A RECENT ATTEMPT TO INFILTRATE PHO SU'S OAND (SEE FTB-20,177). THE CPT MIGHT FEEL THAT A FAILED RECONCILIATION WOULD SUIT ITS PURPOSES. CERTAINLY IT DOES NOT WANT TO STAND ALONE AGAINST THE RTG'S SUPPRESSION FORCES.

D. LIEUTENANT GENERAL SAN CHITPATIMA - THE FOURTH ARMY COMMANDER HAS OFT EXPRESSED HIS OPINION THAT PHO SU IS A COMMON BANDIT. THOUGH THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE SOUTH, SAN APPARENTLY HAD NO ROLE IN THE BUNLOET-PHO SU MEETING. WHILE HE MIGHT NOT ENJOY SUCH AN EXTRANEIOUS ROLE, HE PROBABLY WON'T DEMONSTRATE ANY DISPLEASURE IF BANGKOK, I.E. GENERAL KRIT SIWARA, WANTS THE RECONCILIATION.

VI. WHAT AFTER THE SURRENDER?

17. WHILE THE RTG WANTS PHO SU TO SURRENDER AND HE APPEARS CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 10764 02 OF 02 101129Z

AMENABLE TO GIVING HIMSELF UP, FEW ARE TALKING ABOUT WHAT THE RTG WILL DO WITH ITS PRIZE. THERE APPARENTLY ARE TWO ROUTES, EACH WITH ITS OWN DRAW BACKS:

A. AMNESTY LEGISLATION - HSYAISOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND HAS INTRODUCED AN AMNESTY BILL WHICH MAY APPLY TO PHO SU'S CASE. THE PROBLEM MAY BE THAT VARIOUS GROUPS WILL WANT THEIR PARTICULAR SAINTS TO COME UNDER THE AMNESTY BILL. QUICKLY CLEARING PHO SU'S NAME MAY FALL VICTIM TO PARLIAMENTARY MANEUVERS YET UNSEEN.

B. COURT TRIAL - A COURT DISMISSED THE CASE AGAINST PHO SU ONCE BEFORE AND HE IS KNOWN TO PREFER THIS COURSE. GOING TO COURT MAY EXPOSE THE POLICE TO RIDICULE, A PROCEDURE WHICH WILL HEIGHTEN LOCAL TENSIONS.

VII. THE MEETING'S CONSEQUENCES

18. BEFORE THE APRIL 10 MEETING, WE SPOKE TO A WIDE RANGE OF CIVIL AND POLICE OFFICIALS. THE OPTIMISTS PUT THE CHANCES OF SUCCESS AT EVEN ODDS. FROM THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE SMUTHERN COORDINATION CENTER TO THE COMMANDER OF THE BORDER PATROL POLICE REGION 9, MOST OFFICIALS REGISTERED PESSIMISM.

PHO SU'S ACTUAL SURRENDER IN THIS ENVIRONMENT WILL STARTLE
THE SOUTHERN OFFICIAL COMMUNITY.

19. IF PHO SU SURRENDERS THE FOLLOWING CONSEQUENCES MAY ENSUE:

- A. THE RTG WILL HAVE A CI POLICY, ONE BASED ON PERSUASION
RATHER THAN SUPPRESSION. THE RTG WILL HAVE DRAMATICALLY
DEMONSTRATED A PEACEFUL WAY OUT FOR DISENCHANTED INSURGENTS AND
BANDITS, PROBABLY COUNTRYWIDE;
- B. RTG SUPPRESSION RESOURCES COULD THEN BE DIRECTED
TOWARD THE COMMUNIST SOUTHERN INSURGENCIES;
- C. THE KHUKRIT CABIENT WILL HAVE A HIGHLY VISIBLE SUCCESS,
STRENGTHENING ITS GRIP ON THE REINS OF POWER.

20. IF PHO SU STAYS IN THE JUNGLE:

- A. THE RTG COULD FLOUNDER WITHOUT MAKING A DECISION ON WHAT
CI POLICIES THE KHUKRIT CABINET IS WILLING TO POLITICALLY
SUPPORT;
- B. THE RTG COULD SLIP INTO HAVING A CI POLICY WEIGHTED TOWARD
ARMED SUPPRESSION;
- C. LT. GENERAL SAN CHIPATIMA, WHO KNEW IT WON'T WORK FROM
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PAGE 04 BANGKO 10764 02 OF 02 101129Z

THE BEGINNING, WILL TAKE AN INCREASINGLY FREER HAND IN THE
SOUTH. REUTHER
WHITEHOUSE

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